South Shore Eco Park Task Force

September 24, 2024

(Draft) Discussion Paper

For Allandale Station Park

1. Introduction

As a Task Force of volunteers, we welcome you to a conversation about the future of Allandale Station Park, a beloved, nature park on Barrie's Waterfront Heritage Trail. The Park is also a gateway to the Waterfront Heritage Trail. With minor changes, the Park could become a place of learning about history and nature. It could offer opportunities for Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples. We thank City Council for consideration of the Marshall Green report and look forward to working collaboratively with City Council and staff. The (Draft) DISCUSSION PAPER has two parts.

The SUMMARY REPORT includes:

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S.5 Concept plans for:

"Possible Eco Park and Play Areas"; *(p. 6)* and,
"Allandale Station Park Native Savanna EcoPark" (p.7)

The BACKGROUND REPORT includes:

B.1 What residents love about the Park *(p. 8-9)*

B.2 Bayside Barrie (2023) The Waterfront Strategic Plan Update (*"WSP")* and Allandale Station Park ("*ASP*") *(p.10-12)*

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Cover Photo Credit: Brian Miller, Friends of Allandale Station Park

Summary Report

City of Barrie Land Acknowledgement

The City of Barrie acknowledges the traditional territory of the Anishinaabeg people, which include the Odawa, Ojibwe, and Pottawatomi Nations collectively known as the Three Fires Confederacy. We also acknowledge the Wendat Nation (Huron) who occupied these lands prior to the middle of the 17th century.

We are dedicated to honouring Indigenous history and culture and recognize the enduring presence of Indigenous peoples on this land. We are committed to moving forward in the spirit of reconciliation and respect with all First Nations, Métis, and Inuit People.

S.1 Appreciations

We extend our thanks to:

- **Mayor Alex Nuttall and City Council** for listening to residents about Allandale Station Park and for inviting community consultation;
- **Marshall Green and Bill Scott** for their outstanding contributions to the "Southshore, Barrie Sports and a Revitalized Downtown Report" (*The Marshall Green Report);* and,
- **Barrie residents**, who have given their unflagging energy, time and skills over the last decade and longer to keep Allandale Station Park as a natural place on Barrie's waterfront.

S.2 South Shore Eco Park Task Force

The South Shore Eco Park Task Force is a team of volunteers, who belong to environmental and community associations, including Indigenous representatives. The team brings together expertise in Indigenous history and culture, ecology, education, horticulture, strategic planning, land use planning, biological inventories, geology, science, sociology, history, marketing and other areas. Members are listed on page 18 of the (Draft) Discussion Paper.

The purpose of the Task Force is to provide information and encourage discussion that leads to protecting and enhancing Allandale Station Park as a "nature park", the only park of its kind on Barrie's Waterfront Heritage Trail.

S.3 A vision for the forest and meadow

We are recommending that the forest area, about two thirds of the 6.6-hectare (16.3 acre) site with its majestic stand of Red Oak trees, remain in the current, natural, forest state.

The meadow, the remaining third, offers potential for enhancement and education, while maintaining its meadow-like appearance. Invasive plants have reduced the possible diversity of native species in the meadow. Native plants are vital for our wellbeing. For example, native wildflowers attract native honeybees which, in turn, pollinate much of the food we eat.

We are suggesting restoration of the meadow to the ecologically diverse, rare Prairie Tallgrass and Oak Savanna ecosystems that existed in pre-Settler times. The restoration could become an area natural and scientific interest, and worthy of increased environmental protection measures.

Figure 2: Oak Woodlands and savanna (in background) often occurred in conjunction with tallgrass prairie (in foreground). Photo Larry Lamb

Figure 2 above from a report by Tallgrass Ontario, "Restoring Tallgrass Oak Woodlands in Southern Ontario".

The rare ecosystems and other educational gardens, such as the Pollinator Garden, could inspire Park users to learn and consider changes to their own front and back yards.

An Indigenous garden might also serve as an act of reconciliation and a learning opportunity.

We see the changes in the meadow as a *"win-win"* that offers park users more to experience, in addition to the sheer enjoyment of the Park. With their smart phones, users could have fun and exercise, while utilizing interactive technology with Bluetooth to learn about the Park's features. Indigenous history, including the crucial "*Dish With One Spoon"* peace treaty could be presented. Visitors might also utilize the gamification *"game playing"* platform through Tourism Barrie to discover, identify and learn about the Park's flora and fauna. Our vision for the meadow conforms with the City's Waterfront Strategic Plan Update (2023).

From the perspective of tourism, these changes would augment the Park's attraction for some tourists. However, we do not see the Park achieving the high-ranking stature of the City's other waterfront attractions, such as Centennial Park, the Spirit Catcher and the Flying Monkey Craft Brewery.

S.4 Volunteer contributions

Volunteers have, and will contribute to fundraising, planning, and programming for the Park.

Past efforts include:

- "*Southshore Naturalization Parkland Management Report*" 2019, submitted by Al McNair;
- Design of two concept plans, the eco park, as shown in the Marshall Green Report, and a potential site for an informal play area, also discussed in the Marshall Green report;
- Pollinate Barrie: *"Annotated Resources for Establishing a Tallgrass Prairie/Oak Savanna"* in the Appendix (p. 18)*;*
- "*Some Planning Comments on the Proposed Multi Purpose Sports Field, June 17, 2024"* by Gary Bell, professional land use planner;
- Bird and plant inventories underway by a professional ecologist and a naturalist https://inaturalist.ca/projects/allandale-station-park-biological-inventory
- The Pollinator Garden; and
- Numerous photos by City residents.

In addition, existing community groups are well-situated to provide educational, recreational and environmental programming in partnership with the city. They can provide planning assistance to

ensure an intentional, strategic, and well-executed re-diversification of the park with species historically native to our ecoregion. Restoring this site would provide unique opportunities. As well, volunteers can offer:

- Assistance with applications for funding grants, such as recently announced, Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority program for creating prairies and savannas;
- Fundraising initiatives, including service club involvement;
- Talks about Indigenous growing and harvesting of native edible and culturally ceremonial native plants, such as prairie sage and sweetgrass, an important act of Reconciliation;
- Guided or digital tours related to the Indigenous history of the area;
- Birdwatching tours following the migratory birds that use the site *(in support of our Bird City designation)*;
- Sightseeing tours for our native Butterfly, bee and plant species *(in support of our Bee City designation)*;
- Native Seed-sharing programs and pollinator/restoration gardening workshops;
- Citizen Science initiatives on urban diversity, such as Monarch Butterfly Waystations and David Suzuki Foundation Butterfly ways; and,
- Potential volunteer-led and expert-led tours within Tourism Barrie's Ambassador Program.

S.5 Items for discussion

We offer the following items for discussion:

1. Recognize the role of Allandale Station Park, with its forest and possible eco park, as a unique nature park on the Waterfront Heritage Trail;
2. Maintain the forest and consider changes to the meadow, as noted above;
3. Support Marshall Green Report's Recommendation #4 regarding the Park;
4. Increase environmental protection measures for the Park, such as revisions to the City's Official Plan and Zoning By-law;
5. Revise Barrie's Waterfront Strategic Plan Update to rank the Park in the highest priority 2024-2028 category for implementation and, since the Park is not listed as a budget item, update the budget;
6. Consider a name change for the Park. The Waterfront Strategic Plan Update suggests that possibly an Indigenous name be considered. In order for an Indigenous name to be gifted by an Elder, a protocol involving a traditional offering of tobacco would need to be followed.
7. Establish a monitoring program to ensure that Park use does not degrade the features that we and Park wildlife enjoy;

8. Consider works by Indigenous artists in the Park;
9. In addition to signage, consider Bluetooth interactive technology and gamification tools for educational purposes;
10. Install pathways in the meadow area that are accessible and composed of materials that soak in run-off;
11. To enhance the natural appearance and identify the nature park as a unique part of the Waterfront Heritage Trail, consider benches that have the appearance of sawn logs;
12. The City's Waterfront Strategic Plan Update also has numerous suggestions for consideration *(See page 11 of this Discussion Paper where they are listed)*

S.5 Concept plans for the EcoPark

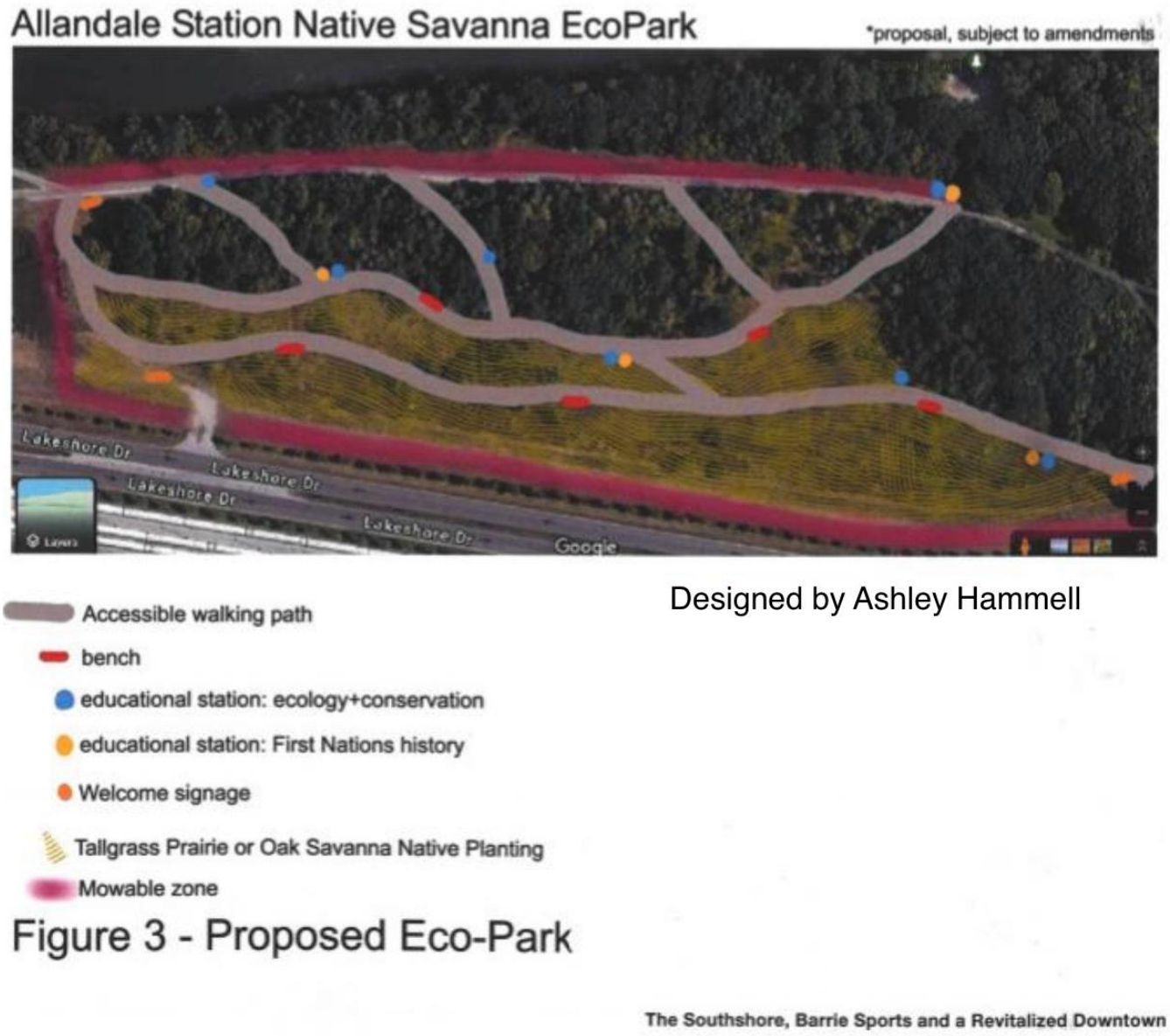


Figure 3 - Proposed Eco-Park

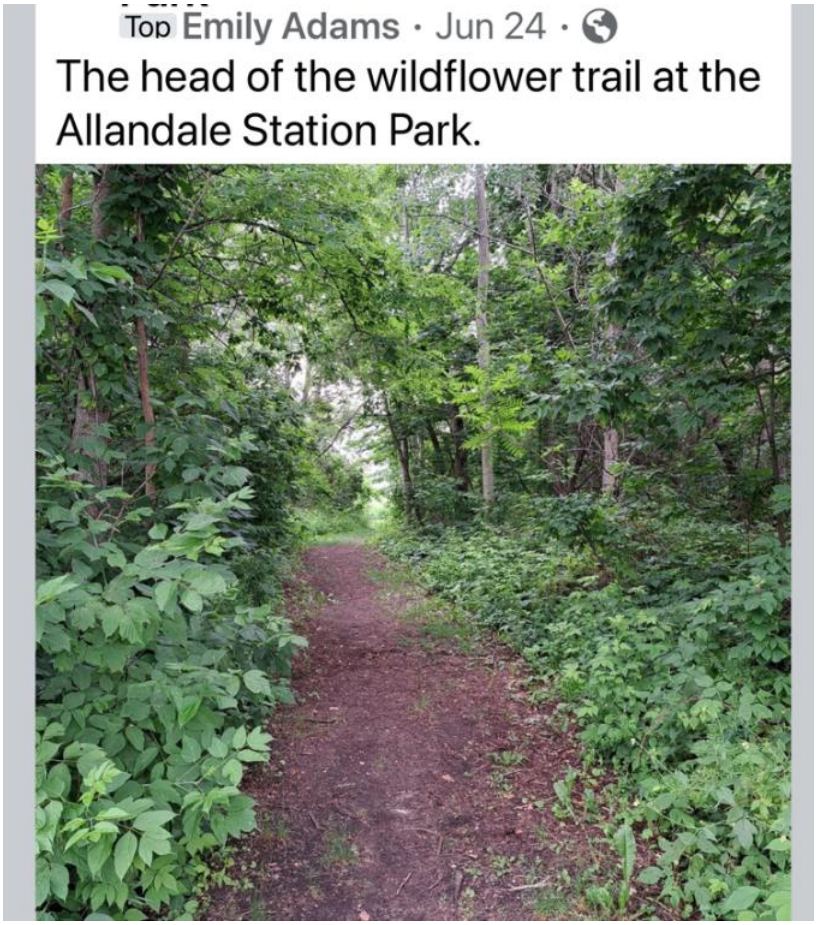
The Southshore, Barrie Sports and a Revitalized Downtown

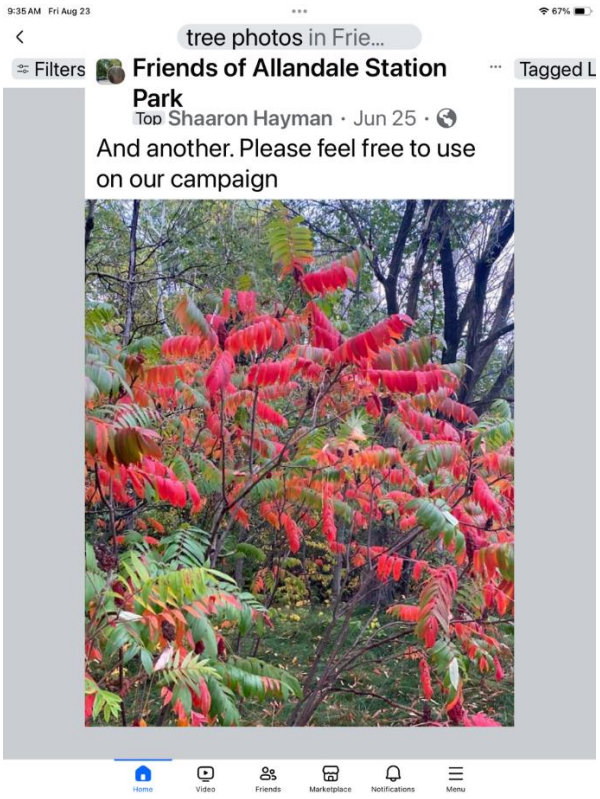
Background Report

B.1 What residents love about the Park.

The Park is the only place along Barrie's Waterfront Heritage Trail that is NATURAL. Residents visit this natural oasis for relaxation, learning, discovery, solace, and inspiration. They love the diversity in this 16.3 acres of parkland that has waterfront, forest, wildflower, wildlife and meadow experiences that change with each season. A resident shared that it is the only place in the City where her son can experience a forest in a wheelchair. The pollinator meadow, created by Pollinate Barrie, helps give the City its "*Bird City"* and *"Bee City"* designations.

The Park is a cherished destination for walkers, bikers, birdwatchers, photographers and artists. Here are just a few of the photos, posted on the Friends of the Allandale Station Park Facebook page, that demonstrate the passion residents feel about the Park.

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67%
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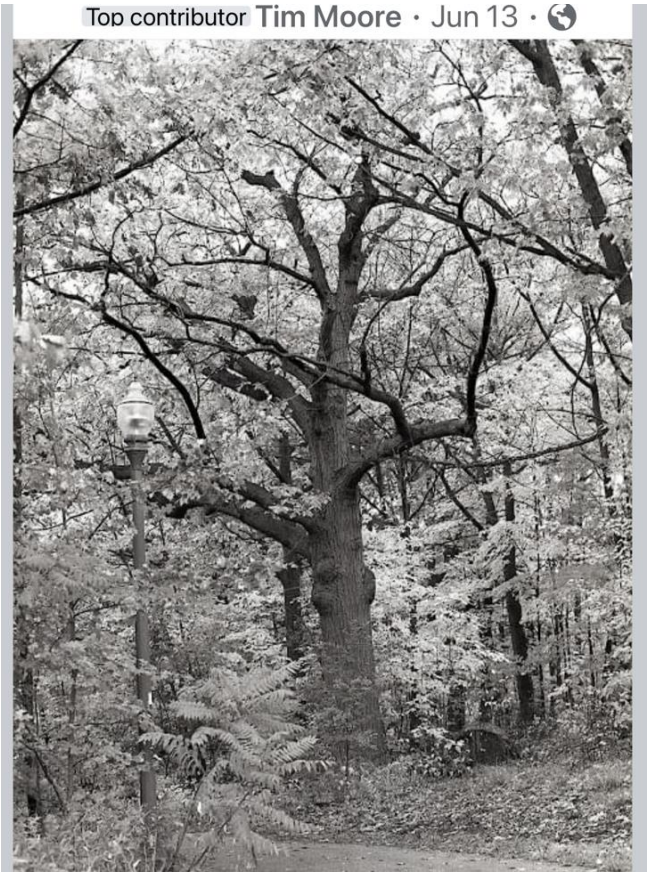
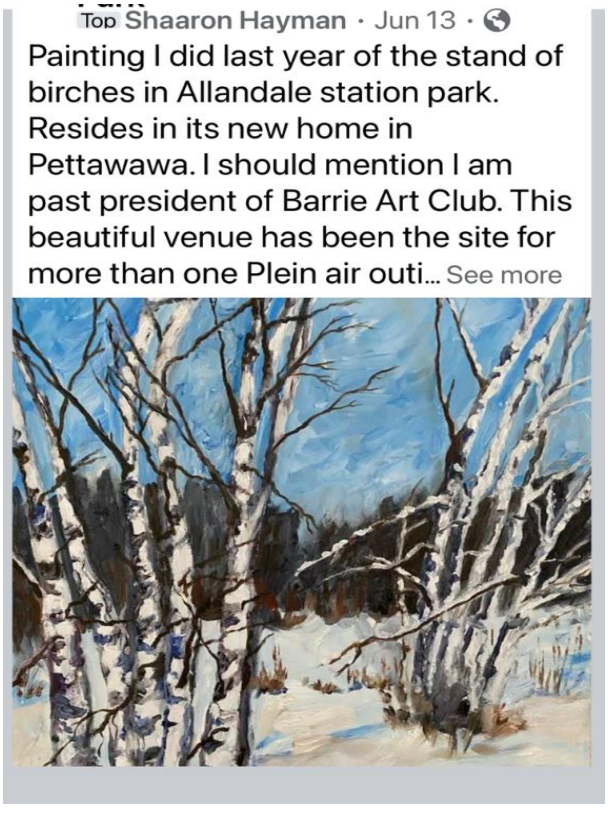
Filters
Friends of Allandale Station Park
Tagged L
Top Shaaron Hayman · Jun 25 ·
And another. Please feel free to use on our campaign
Home
Video
Friends
Marketplace
Notifications
Menu


Top contributor Tim Moore · Jun 13 ·


Top Shaaron Hayman · Jun 13 ·
Painting I did last year of the stand of birches in Allandale station park. Resides in its new home in Pettawawa. I should mention I am past president of Barrie Art Club. This beautiful venue has been the site for more than one Plein air outi... See more

B.2 Bayside Barrie (2023) The Waterfront Strategic Plan Update (*"WSP"*) and Allandale Station Park ("*ASP*")

B.2.1 Waterfront Strategic Plan Update: Goals and Objectives

The WSP is based on three pillars that aim to provide *"inclusive", "resilient"* and *"activated"* experiences for waterfront visitors. (page 30)

Among the top ten strategic priorities for the waterfront, especially related to the Allandale Station Park, are *#6: Promote climate adaptability and environmental protection*, *#8: Utilize the Waterfront to achieve larger economic and tourism development goals,* and *#10: Create Master Plans that recognize each park's contribution to the waterfront*. (page 39)

There are recommendations that support a natural and diverse plan for ASP. The WSP mentions Barrie's City pollinator initiatives and insists that the meadow at ASP be maintained and enhanced, and that a diversity of native plant species be ensured. It advises that environmental education be increased for plant and wildlife identification and more support provided for enhanced shoreline habitats to support migratory birds. The City is to implement an Invasive Species Strategy and update the Naturalization Policy, for example. (pages 62-63).

B.2.2 The WSP ranks Allandale Station Park as low priority with no capital budget.

Strangely enough, in spite of its large area, residents' love for the Park and its key position as an entrance to the Waterfront Heritage Trail, the WSP ranked ASP as a *"Tertiary Activity Centre" (that generates lower level of activity)* along with other City parks, like Nelson Square, that isn't on the shoreline (Appendix C, page 03).

The WSP also completely overlooked ASP when it came to its Implementation Strategy. ASP was not included in the Short Term (2024-2028), Medium Term (2029-2033) or Long Term (2034+) Capital Improvement Budgets. Nelson Square was allotted $100,000 for a Master Plan and $1,000,000 for its implementation in the Long Term, for example (pages 84-86).

B.2.3 WSP Analysis and Recommendations for Allandale Station Park

Appendix C of the WSP maps the boundaries, and lists existing conditions and recommendations.

B.3.7 Allandale Station Park

Existing Conditions

Allandale Station Park is located east of Military Heritage Park and west of the South Shore. The City of Barrie's Waterfront Heritage Trail begins within Allandale Station Park. The park is 16.3 acres in size and half covered by mature trees. The other half of the park consists of an open lawn area that is maintained, but largely underutilized. The Trans Canada Trail, Waterfront Heritage Trail and a local footpath run primarily east-west through the park. Allandale Station Park includes a sloping beach which is the only point of access to the water at this park. A parking lot is located nearby, where White Oaks Road meets the end of the Waterfront Trail. The Waterfront Trail is a self-guided walking tour that will lead trail users along a historical path of Barrie. Elements of this tour may highlight geological, Indigenous, topographic, industrial, social and military aspects of Barrie's history.

- Location: Lakeshore Drive
- Area: 16.3 Acres
- Key Features:
  - Beach
  - Adult Fitness Station
- Opportunities:
  - Revitalize and improve utilization of the open lawn area
  - Stabilize the sloped beach and increase safety

Recommendations

Allandale Station Park has the potential to contribute to eco-education and rewilding through further naturalization and environmental stewardship. A Park Plan should be developed for Allandale Station Park to ensure future design and environmental interventions are strategic and align with the waterfront vision. The following recommendations should be considered through the park design process. These recommendations require further feasibility analysis and are non-exhaustive—they should not limit further visioning as the design process continues.

- Undertake a Park Plan for Allandale Station Park.
- Introduce enhanced signage and delineation between Allandale Station Park and the adjacent Military Heritage Park and South Shore Park to ensure that a unique identity is created for the park.
- Integrate iconic native species landscaping with integrated public art and stormwater management functionality along the shoreline to provide the dual function of contributing to the an Arts Trail and climate adaptation.
- Revegetate, restore and stabilize the sloping beach against erosion and remove public shoreline access. Enhance as an elevated lookout point.
- Incorporate eco-education opportunities within Allandale Station Park in the form of plaques, art, interactive seasonal installations and native landscaping for habitat creation and rewilding.
- Install waterfront gateway signage at the east entrance with wayfinding.
- Consider restoring the meadow to a dedicated oak savanna by planting oak trees and providing environmental education on the ability of mature oak trees to support the greatest diversity of species and carbon sequestration capacity.
- Review the park names for Allandale Station Park and South Shore Park to explore alternate names, as previously discussed. Further consider the opportunity to consult with the Wendat-Huron Nation to request the gift of an Indigenous name for the Park to commemorate the presence and land use of the historic inhabitants.
- Consider creating a new destination experience through a high-quality, tactile outdoor wildlife sculpture trail at Station 1 of the Waterfront Heritage Trail, supported by interpretation.

In addition to walking tours and park signage, we are suggesting an on-line, outdoor education program for the Park that could be used by visitors, families and school classes. The Bluetooth "gamification" *(adding gamelike elements to encourage participation)* program would rely on phone apps that guide the identification of plant and wildlife discovered.

B.3 Official Plan, Zoning and Other Protection Measures

The City's new Official Plan designates the Park as *Green Space* that allows both active uses such as sports fields, and passive recreational uses. Much of the forest and waterfront has an *Environmental Protection 2 Overlay*. The meadow has an *Environmental Protection 3 Overlay*. Both Overlays allow development, subject to appropriate environmental studies. Zoning By 2009-141 and the new Draft 3 Zoning By-law would also permit buildings and structures, associated with a wide variety of uses that are permitted in greenspace zones .

We suggest that the City consider keeping the Park in its entirety as a natural area with NO DEVELOPMENT ALLOWED, beyond the natural features of the Park. Options include changes to the Official Plan, the Zoning By-law, and perhaps a municipal land conservation trust. We agree with Marshall Green's *"environmental zoning"*. We further suggest that the Park in its entirety be placed in a special Zoning By-law zone, perhaps an exception zone. This special zone would *not "permit buildings, or any other uses, except environmental conservation, ecological management measures, naturalized buffers, natural restoration and accessory uses of environmental interpretation, nature trails, benches and lookout points."*

B.5 Planning the "Forest" and "Meadow"

B.5.1 The Forest

The forest area in the Park has developed in an organic fashion. As plants and animals have arrived in the Park, they have stayed if they found conditions to their liking. The Park is blessed with features from this organic growth process, such as the majestic, native Red Oak trees and the shy fox family that has created a den in the Park.

Special points of interest can be discovered in the forest, such as this message in the middle of a forest trail.

Photo by Paul Joseph Ecker in Friends of Allandale Station Park, June 9

Over the years, park usage by residents has also impacted on the natural features. An example is the eroded shoreline access, as identified in the WSP.

We concur with the WSP that the sloped shoreline access, shown here in this photo, should be addressed. However, we suggest that the recommendation to remove the access be reconsidered.

We are further suggesting monitoring occur to ensure that Park use does not degrade the features that we and Park wildlife enjoy.

B.5.2 The Meadow

Invasive species have also arrived in the meadow. They have unduly thrived and suffocated the native landscapes that were filled with biodiversity and are the best food sources for wildlife. As noted above, the City's WSP does not support invasive species and encourages naturalization.

Without management guidelines and implementation, the meadow in the Park would disappear under regrowth. It is most vulnerable to change. We are suggesting another vision for the meadow, other than the scattered changes currently occurring.

We are proposing the following two changes for the meadow in the Park: *"Tallgrass Prairie"* and *"Oak Savanna"*, as suggested in the City's Waterfront Strategic Plan. They can be looked at as individual options or together as a pair.

B.6 Tallgrass Prairie and Oak Savanna

Figure 3: Tallgrass prairie in bloom. Photo Larry Lamb

It is difficult to believe that Allandale Station Park, along with parts of southern Ontario were once prairie. "*Many accounts of early Ontario stress the heavily forested nature of the land and created the image of vast, unbroken forest. Yet the early French explorers and first settlers of southwestern Ontario also discovered extensive, open landscapes. They encountered the outlying remnants of oak savanna and tallgrass prairie which once dominated a large portion of midwestern North America along the eastern edge of the Great Plains" (Ojibway Nature Centre Windsor, "Tallgrass Prairie in Southern Ontario").*

There are only eight locations where the public can view Tallgrass Prairies in southern Ontario.

The closest established prairie and savanna is in Toronto's High Park, although a prairie site in Holland Landing is being restored (See "*Restoring a rare ecosystem at Holland Landing Prairie Provincial Park")*.

The largest, protected Tallgrass Prairie and Oak Savannah is the Ojibway Prairie Complex in the southwest corner of the City of Windsor with 260 hectares (642 acres). The Complex boasts more

than 4,000 species and over 160 rare plants, insects, reptiles, birds and mammals. The Park and Nature Centre welcome about 100,000 visitors per year. The Complex is adjacent to Ontario Parks Ojibway Prairie Provincial Reserve with an additional 105 hectares (259 acres).

High Park, Toronto, in spring. Black oaks tower above an understorey of prairie grasses (Little bluestem, Big bluestem), aster species and other forbs. N Hewitt, April 29, 2017.

In southern Ontario, in addition to the Black Oak Savannas in High Park and the Windsor Prairie Complex, there is a Black Oak Savanna on the Alderville First Nation lands, south of Rice Lake which also has a plant nursery, as well as areas of Pinery and Rondeau Provincial Parks. South of Pinery, the Boy Scouts have restored an Oak Savanna in Camp Attawndaron, with the Province investing $52,000 to restore a portion of the *"globally rare ecosystem"*.

The next chart from *"Restoring Tallgrass Oak Woodlands in Southern Ontario"* outlines the characteristics of Tallgrass Prairies and Oak Savannas:

Table 1. Similarities and differences between Tallgrass Prairie, Oak Savanna, Oak Woodland and Forest

	Tallgrass Prairie	Oak Savanna	Oak Woodland	Forest
Canopy Closure	0 - 24%	25 - 35%	36 - 60%	> 60%
Fire	Frequent high intensity	Frequent low intensity or infrequent high intensity	Frequent, low intensity	Usually infrequent (forest-type specific)
Layers	- Ground	- Tree canopy - Ground	- Tree canopy - Shrub (patchy) - Ground	- Tree canopy - Tree sub-canopy - Shrub - Ground
Dominant Species	- Tall grasses such as Big Bluestem - Numerous wildflowers, such as Butterfly-weed	- Oaks with hickory, poplar, pine - Prairie grasses and wildflowers, such as sunflowers	- Oaks with hickory, poplar, pine - Savanna and open forest grasses, sedges and wildflowers	- Sugar Maple - American Beech - Ash Spring wildflowers, such as Trilliums

Figure 1: Oak Woodland Prescribed Burn
Photo: Larry Lamb

The Indigenous peoples used fire to manage both Tallgrass Prairie and Oak Savannas.

Here is an excerpt from the Ojibway Prairie Complex Windsor website about the reason for fire and their success with controlled fires:

"*Fire is critical to the natural ecology of prairie and oak savannah ecosystems. Prescribed burning mimics the fires of long ago and has proven to be an effective tool in the management of tallgrass prairie and oak savannah. These habitats recover quickly from prescribed burns and fire helps to prevent the establishment of invasive woody vegetation. Fire removes the buildup of thatch and returns the stored-up nutrients back to the soil.*

With earlier exposure to the sun, the perennial warm season grasses and wildflowers generally experience increased growth, flowering and seed production after a fire while the thick bark of mature oak trees assists in providing protection from the fire....

Busy streets, residential housing, horse racing track, stables, natural gas lines, an active railway line, a cellular tower and a major hydro transmission corridor have occurred or do occur within or adjacent Ojibway Prairie Complex. The burn program's success has been attributed to the level of cooperation between involved agencies, especially the Ministry of Natural Resources and the City of Windsor. Public education and research have always been an important aspect of the program. Prescribed burns are preceded by and followed up with an active education program targeting the public, park users and staff...

Prescribed burns are scheduled on an annual basis, usually in early spring before the spring emergence of most rare reptiles, and prior to bird nesting. The entire burning operation is being conducted by professional fire staff who are trained in fire behaviour and control..." (Ojibway Nature Centre Windsor, "Prescribed Burning in Ojibway Prairie Complex" ojibway.ca).

In Toronto, a frequent High Park user and neighbour has also commented that the controlled fires are not a problem for her. The City posts warning signs in advance of the controlled burns. The resident noted that controlled fires are a better way to get rid of weeds, rather than toxic chemicals.

Pollinate Barrie has prepared an extensive list of resources for establishing Tallgrass Prairies and Oak Savannas. The group also suggests that goats could be used as another management option.

A casual observer wouldn't notice a substantial difference between the existing meadow in Allandale Station Park and an Oak Savanna.

Figure 4: Oak Savanna. Photo: Graham Buck

The City of Toronto has prepared a management manual for the Oak Savanna at High Park which could be adapted to other communities.

B.7 Tourism in Barrie

Tourism plays a vital role in Barrie's economy, with tourism spending having an impact of $634 million and 582,500 tourist overnight stays in 2023, according to Kathleen Trainor of Tourism Barrie (*Marshall Green Report*, page 39).

Trip Advisor advises that Barrie's waterfront is the most popular destination according to tourists. The City's current top attractions are Centennial Park *(467 mentions*) on the west shore of Kempenfelt Bay, and the Spirit Catcher Sculpture *(289 mentions)* and Flying Monkey Craft Brewery *(239 mentions)* on the north shore.

Parks in the City are also tourist attractions. The Arboretum at Sunnidale Park, for example, is the City's fourth highest, tourist destination with 164 mentions, according to Trip Advisor. The Bear Creek Eco Park received 7 mentions. Allandale Station Park had 2 mentions.

The suggested changes to the Park's meadow, the education use of interactive technology and gamification, as well as guided tours, will augment Allandale Station's Park attraction along the City's waterfront. However, it is not anticipated that these changes will elevate the Park to a major attraction status.

Appendix

Pollinate Barrie: "*Annotated Resources for Establishing a Tallgrass Prairie/Oak Savanna"*

Resources for Establishing Tallgrass Prairie.pdf

South Shore Eco Park Task Force

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Phyllis Tremblay

'Vanessa Kennedy

Marshall Green, author of ***The Southshore, Barrie Sports and a Revitalized Downtown*** and "Bill" William Scott, who assisted Marshall throughout his work, are resource advisors to the Task Force.